

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Akera Spears, and I am from Meriden, CT. I am a Senior student at Southern Connecticut State University in the BSW program.

I stand in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of Husky Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status. The State of Connecticut should be ensuring that our immigrant community has access to the basic human right of healthcare, regardless of their status, by expanding access to the HUSKY program. While extending the access age to 26 is a good start, we cannot, in good faith, stop there. Open access needs to be available for all immigrant community members of all ages to ensure that the residents of Connecticut continue to thrive and grow.

I have been interning at Yale New Haven Hospital and have met critically ill individuals who have no healthcare coverage due to their immigration status. I had the privilege of caring for a young woman living with an incurable autoimmune disorder. She is unable to receive care or medication to make her disease manageable because her immigration status leaves her ineligible for healthcare coverage. She arrived at the hospital incapable of walking and severely ill. She told me that she only seeks care in emergent situations like this because she can't afford the medications she needs. I asked her what she would do when she was discharged from the hospital. She told me she will enjoy a few days of relief from her symptoms and once her condition worsens, she will return to the Emergency Room. She has developed depression due to being stuck in the house sick and has admitted to having suicidal ideation at times to escape her painful reality. How can the State of Connecticut tell this young woman that she can't receive health insurance that would allow her to receive life-sustaining care for a disease that chose her? How can legislation idly sit by knowing that this young woman and so many like her

live like this? These are our community members. They deserve the basic human right of receiving quality affordable health care. As a young woman also living with an incurable autoimmune disorder, I cannot fathom not having access to the medication that allows me to continue to thrive in life simply because State legislation thinks my immigration status makes me undeserving.

In the past, we have granted healthcare access to immigrant children ages 0-12 regardless of status because morally it is the right thing to do. We need to stand on those same morals for every immigrant to promote healthy families that will thrive in our community. The State of Connecticut would benefit by ensuring that all community members have every opportunity to live a healthy life. Hospitals would also be saved from millions of dollars of unpaid health care treatments annually. That money saved can be spent on improving our healthcare system and funding research studies aimed at curing disease.

I support HB 6616 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. I ask that in the very near future, work begins on opening access to immigrant community members of all ages.

Thank you for your time,
Akeria Spears